

FIRST WEAPONS: THE ART OF HUNTING GAME

Using an Atlatl-and-Dart

The atlatl is a tool, or an extension of the arm, that gives more power to the dart. It increases the velocity (speed) of the dart, giving the hunter more power for killing his prey. It's a little bit like using a lever or a tennis racket. At first, aim is less accurate, but with practice the atlatl-and-dart is an effective hunting tool.



Atlatl-and-darts were used by many cultures. Look for this Northwest Coast atlatl in the exhibit.



Try it!

At home, find a heavy box, a broom handle, and a small block. Tip the box to the side. Now position the block (or fulcrum) near the box. Gently place the end of the broom handle under the edge of the box and rest the handle over the fulcrum. Now try tipping the box using your lever. Experiment by moving fulcrum closer and farther away from the box. How does that change the efficiency of your lever? The lever is a tool, making it possible to tip an item that was too heavy to tip without it.

Matching Game

Look at the pictures of animals in the exhibit.

Match an animal to the weapon you think might be used to hunt it.

Why do you think it's important to know which weapon is the best for each game animal?

Atlatl-and-Dart Hook Blow Gun Woven Net Harpoon



Think About It:

Some people are opposed to hunting animals for food. If you had to hunt for your own food, would it change the way you feel about animals? Would it change the way you feel about hunting? Would it change the way you feel about eating meat?

Do you think raising your own animals for food (domesticated animals such as hogs and chickens) is different than or similar to hunting for food?

Do you think hunting for sport differs from hunting for food? Why?

Some weapons in the exhibit were made for hunting game, while others were made for person-to-person warfare. How do these differ from the hunting weapons? Why do you think that is?



Which artifact in the exhibit would you most like to handle or use? Why? Do any of the artifacts frighten you or cause a negative reaction? Why?

Select two weapons in the exhibit. Determine which animals those weapons were used to hunt. Does the size of these weapons relate to the size of the prey? How?

Look at the timeline on the exhibit wall. Why did the use of the atlatl last so long? What is different between the spear and atlatl periods? How do those times compare to the weapons of mass destruction period? (Hint: What is the "prey" or "target" in each time period?)

Weapon –

- 1: something (as a club, knife, or gun) used to injure, defeat or destroy
- 2: a means of contending against another

From Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1996

Primitive –

1. first; at or relating to the first stages or form of something.
2. simple in design or construction.

from Encarta World English Dictionary, 1999, on-line (captured 7-7-2005)

Most of the weapons seen in this exhibit were made and used for hunting. Think about the words "weapon" and "primitive" based on these definitions. How does "primitive" describe the weapons in the exhibit? How does thinking about weapons in the 21st century affect your view of weapons used for procuring (obtaining) food? What factors influence the changing use of words in your language?

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Hunting with Nets

Did you notice the woven net along the back wall of the exhibit? It's used for hunting ducks and rabbits. When many people attended celebrations, great quantities of food were needed. Hunting with the net allowed the people to increase their yield well beyond the needs of an individual family or clan.



the net material, and made into long cordage lengths. Finally, the cordage was woven, resulting in the finished net.

Look at the net in the exhibit (a photographic detail is to the right). Estimate:

- the **length** of the whole net (hint: the back wall is about 26 feet long)
- the **number of squares** it contains; each one is created by four precisely tied knots
- the **amount of time** required to make it. Consider collecting the plants, removing the fiber, twisting fiber into cordage, and weaving the net.
- the **weight** of the net.

Nets were made from plant fibers, such as yucca, sage, milkweed, nettle, or dogbane. First they had to collect and prepare the fiber. Making enough cordage for a net this size would require parts from hundreds of plants. The fibers had to be prepared by removing them from the rest of the plant tissue. Then the fibers were twisted, as you can see by looking closely at



“Hunting” for Game in the Museum

Find the following animals in the Mammal Hall (lower level) or in the Bird Hall (upper level). What products can each animal provide? For example, does it provide meat for food and skin (leather) for clothing?

Mule deer
Bison
Black Bear
Moose
Pronghorn

Cormorant
Quail
Jackrabbit
Ground Squirrel
Seal



Hunting Today

Today, it is not possible for all the people on our planet to support themselves by hunting and gathering their food. Especially in urban and suburban areas, people and development have replaced most of the native habitats and the game animals that once supported entire cultures. But people still hunt in rural and natural areas of the United States. Hunting is a common and reliable method of wildlife management in open space and wilderness areas. Some families continue to rely on wild game for food.

Proper licenses and training are needed in the United States to hunt or fish legally and safely. There are hunting seasons for many game species. While some people do hunt and fish for food, others enjoy hunting as outdoor recreation, and some are motivated to conquer nature or accomplish a personal physical challenge. All require skill, patience and knowledge of the natural world for success.

If you had to feed yourself by hunting, fishing, and gathering plant foods, imagine the skill and knowledge you would need. You can learn to know nature just as well without hunting, too. Develop your observation skills by spending periods of time outdoors, especially going to one location often. You'll begin to recognize wildlife signs, learn their behavior patterns, and know when to expect to see them as the seasons change. Take a camera instead of a gun — enjoy!



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